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SUBJECT William Colby Assesses William Casey's CIA Legacy

JED DUVALL: A principal figure in the Iran-Contra affair is dead. CIA Director William Casey died early today in a New York area hospital at the age of 74 of complications from pneumonia. Casey had resigned his CIA post in February, in his struggle to recover from brain cancer surgery.

Casey has been identified as a key figure in the operation to supply arms to the Nicaraguan Contras after Congress had prohibited such aid.

In a few moments in Good Morning America, we will hear from another former CIA Director, William Colby.

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CHARLES GIBSON: As you may have heard, we have learned this morning that William Casey, who was the CIA Director during the first six years of the Ronald Reagan Administration, died this morning of pneumonia. But he really had been incapacitated since a brain tumor was discovered early this year -- late last year, actually.

And we asked on very short notice a man who has also held the CIA Director's position, William Colby, to come in and join us this morning.

Nice to have you here, sir.

WILLIAM COLBY: Thank you.

GIBSON: What do you think William Casey's legacy will be at the CIA?

WILLIAM COLBY: Well, I think he did two major things. First, he picked them up after the bad days of the '70s and put them back to work. Not every one of his operations was a great success, but that's true of all of us.

The second major thing he did was to reorganize the analytical side of the agency, so that it's much more responsive to the intelligence problems that need to be addressed by our government.

GIBSON: And in so doing, we understand, restored morale at the CIA.

COLBY: Oh, yes, very much so. But that's part of putting them back to work. That's where the morale will be high, when they're really working hard on a job they think is important.

GIBSON: It is interesting, though, that while internally he may have been seen as such a great success, externally, outside the CIA, there's been great questions about his stewardship.

COLBY: Well, there are certain questions about anybody's stewardship of any job. You don't win them all, by any means. But I think, on balance, he did a very fine job as Director.

GIBSON: Frustration, I guess, for him, and probably for you -- we heard him say in a news report earlier this morning, an old sound clip of his, he said the problem with being CIA Director is nobody ever hears about your successes.

COLBY: That's right.

GIBSON: But we do hear about the failures.

COLBY: Well, you also, I think, have heard a little bit about one of the successes, which is the assistance to the Mujahideen in Afghanistan, a thing that we all agree on. We think it's a good idea, and it's gone very well.

GIBSON: What will be his legacy in terms of covert operations? Is there now a greater restriction on covert operations, given what has been learned about the Iran operation, the funding of the Contras?

COLBY: No, I don't think so. I think the effect of these investigations will show a few CIA fingerprints a little bit over the edge of what's proper, but nothing substantial with respect to the Contra aid.

With respect to the Iran activity, I think, there, it was clearly conducted under presidential directive. And one of those directives was not to tell the Congress, which was a great mistake.

GIBSON: You think so?

COLBY: Yes.

GIBSON: One of the interesting ironies out of all this, of course, is that his death coincides with the beginning of the Iran-Contra hearings. You knew Bill Casey, as you said a moment ago as we were talking just before we went on the air, an old friend. Was he very frustrated, do you expect, that he couldn't testify in these hearings?

COLBY: That -- I really haven't had any direct contact with him since he was taken by the tumor.

GIBSON: Knowing him as you do, though, I would...

COLBY: Well, he's a very activist man and he responded to challenge. He was a risk-taker and he believed in marching into the middle of the battle on any issue.

GIBSON: Who started as an intelligence officer, did he not? He goes way back to the beginning days.

COLBY: He was in OSS during World War II and he devised system of sending agents into Nazi Germany, which was generally thought by most people as quite impossible. But he did very well.

GIBSON: William Colby, thank you for joining us this morning. Nice to have you here. Thanks for coming in.

COLBY: Thank you.